

[Mother Horn's Church]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK 9 Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Vivian Morris

ADDRESS 225 W. 130th St. New York City

DATE January 4, 1938

SUBJECT CHRISTMAS NIGHT AT MOTHER HORN's CHURCH

1. Date and time of interview Christmas night, 1938
2. Place of interview Pentecostal Church, 129th St. & Lenox Ave.
3. Name and address of informant Observed by this staff-writer
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Refer to interview of 11/23/38—"God was Happy-Mother Horn"

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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The church was packed. Religious zeal, brought on by the holiday season seemed to exude from the fanatic like faces of the followers of Mother Horn.

The services began in an unprecedented fashion. A collection was taken up while the different saints and members of the group got up and testified.

A big fine looking sister gave the salutatory preface to the unusual procedure of taking the collection, first. She raised her arms, saying, "Saints and brothers, we's goin' tuh tak do [collechohn?] firs' cause we wants tuh tak' up as much money wile Mother Ho'ns away as we do wen she's heah. De on'y way we kin do dis is to tek up three collections. One, at the begennin one in in de middle an' one at the en. We'll begin by my testifyin den y'all can testify as de sperit moves yo:" She waves her arms as a signal for the sisters, at their stations and in the strategic points of the church, to begin their job.

"Now, I'll tell y'all 'bout a wonderful thang that happened to me las' week. I wanted wuk, in de wus way. So I got down on mah knees an' start prayin. Next day jobs came tumblin in, evah which-away. One came from White Plains an I tol' de lady I wouldn' tek' less dan five

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dollas a day, cause I didn' want de job anyhow. Den, praise de Lawd, de 'oman say she give me five dallas an! praise Gawd- carfare. Amen.”

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“Amen.” Several of the steady sisters wagged their heads from side to side then nodded a vociferous approval.

A young girl, of an easily moved temperament, jumped up and began testifying in a shrill voice. Her story did not ring true, but she carried the crowd with her tearful rendition. “Day before Christmas I tol' my mother I wanted shoes for Christmas an' she said I couldn't have them because the rent was due and had to be paid,” she said tearfully. The members listened silently. “Then, I opened the door and started to go out, I saw a lady outside of our door an' the Lord said for me to follow her. I followed her to 125th Street an she opened her pocket book an' took out five dollars an' an' gave it to me an' tol' me to get myself a pair of shoes-boo-hoo!”

The church was pierced with short, “Huhs”, Praise Gawds,” and “by de will uh de lord.” Then a sister started to softly hum a tune. The others joined and soon the church was rocking to the hand-clapping of the sisters and the rhythm of the hymn.

The young girl, who had testified, became filled with the “spirits” and, after a few preliminary yelps took a running dive and landed in the laps of the white clad saints sitting in the first row. She stretched out rigidly and the sisters gently put her on the floor and covered her with a filthy blanket.

The two white men sitting on the left of the pulpit, one of whom was the guest preacher for a week. slapped their thighs, exchanged remarks, and laugh loudly. (Maybe that was the way the spirit moved them). Their mode of religious expression merits only a disapproving glance from the three gargantuan sisters seated in the [center?] of the pulpit. They became silent.

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At the conclusion of the hymn, a muddy-yellow man, who was seated on the right of the pulpit, jumped up and lifted both hands sayin; in a booming voice, “Evah-body say Amen.”

“Amen!”

“This sho is good meat, roun' heah tonight.” He stood, smiling, with 3 his thumbs hooked in the arm holes of his vest. He looked like a retired gambler who had dropped into preaching in his old-age, because it was a soft racket.

“Evah body say aman, again,” he repeated.

“Amen!”

“Alright,” he said “Now sing one uh dam good ol' sweet hymns-'Walk in Jerusalm Jus' Like John!’

The piano played a chorus and then the other voices blended in. There were varied interpritations of the words but the music was sweet-it touched something deep, untangible. Maybe the Holy Ghost was really here.

One of the younger brothers was seized with the spirit and he charged down the aisle and leaped straight up, twisted, and landed on his head with a sickening thud. No faking there—he was out like a light. A blanket was thrown over the inert, crumpled form.

A young girl, attired in a swanky fur coat, began to walk up and down the aisle warming up for the “rolling” exhibition that she was to put on in a few minutes.

The singing increased and the girl in the fur coat walked faster. Up the aisle—down. Up—down—up—down—she was running. She threw her arms out wildly shouting, “Glory, glory!” Some women in white grabbed her. They took her watch off and rubbed her spine—her breasts, frenziedly. She passed out.

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Two little boys, about four or five years old, began swaying their arms in hypnotic cadence. They fixed their eyes vacantly on the ceiling. They were well rehearsed in their act.

After a long time, the big brother who looked like a gambler raised his hands for silence. "We'll now interduce the speaker of de evnin! He's gine make a fire and brimstone ta'k on back-sliders. Dis is reb'n Crum."

Reverend Crum was a shabbily dressed, red faced individual with stringy light hair. He walked to the center of the pulpit with a bouncing stride and began in a cackling fishmonger-like voice, "We're goin' to talk about, on this glorious Christmas night, backsliders and these penny pinching women. Praise God."

"Amen."

He spread his stumpy legs apart and shook his pudgy fingers at the congregation saying; snappily, "You know, brothers an' sisters, there's some of us sisters (puts hands on hips and mimics a woman) who pinch a penny here and pinch a penny there-an' hide it in the piano. You know." (he winks)

"Amen!" chorus the brothers.

"Gawd don't like that—Praise his name!" said Crum. "But that ain't the worst of it—oh no. When they git a few dollars saved, they sneak out to the gin joints and drink gin and smoke cigarettes and come in at one or two o'clock and say to their husbands, "Sleep on dear, I've been to church."

"Preach", yell the brothers.

He looks at the audience in a mock startled fashion. "What are you brouthers takin 'bout? Your turn is next. Oh yes—Praise Gawd."

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"A'ha! chortle the sisters gleefully.

"Some of you men—leave your wives and put the blame on them, oh yes. You say they are no good-don't you?" Crum looked around dramatically.

"Yeh!" say the sisters (some of them evidently having been ousted by their spouses.)

"When the real reason is," he paused, ' "you want to move in with some other no' count jezebel!"

The women screamed in approval and stamped their feet in a stady acclaim.

But Crum didn't know how to clinch his point. He rambled off on some other muck which did not interest the members and they began leaving. First, they left singly, then they left in droves.

"I see some of the brothers and sisters can't take these stones I'm throwin'", smirked Crum.

The faithful saints in white supported him with weak, mechanical, "Amen" —"Amen"—

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But, the people continued to leave.

The sister who was in charge of lifting the collection looked at the people who were leaving, with a frantic anxious expression.

Rev. Crum took a hint and cut his sermon down.

He had barely finished speaking when the, sister jumped up with the collection plate saying, to the few remaining people, "Y'all haf to sacrifice more, cause so many left an' I

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wants one dolla' fum eveah-body heah. Ef you can' give, jes' set still an' pray dat dose who can give, give enuf to mek' up yo' share. Amen. Pass de plate sisters.”

The sisters passed the plates and lifted a goodly unannounced, amount.

The big, gambler-like, brother motioned for everybody to bow. He prayed.